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Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report summarizes the situation of Palestinian women between September 2002 and September 2003. It reviews the effects of continued movement restriction and closures, the construction of settlements, outposts and a separation wall, as well as the unfolding socio-economic crisis, on the situation of women. The report provides an overview of the assistance provided to Palestinian women by entities of the United Nations system, in particular with regard to economic activities, humanitarian assistance, education and training, health, the human rights of women, and the media and advocacy. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2003/42 of 22 July 2003 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council, concerned about the grave deterioration of the situation of Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation and to assist Palestinian women by all available means, and submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-eighth session a report, including information provided by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report, which covers the period from September 2002 to September 2003, assesses the situation of Palestinian women based on information from United Nations bodies or individuals that monitor the situation of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in the refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Such bodies and individuals include the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the United Nations Human Rights Inquiry Commission, the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, and the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. Despite occasional references to the situation of women, the reports of those bodies and individuals rarely provided an in-depth analysis of the specific situation of women within the overall population during the reporting period.

3. The report further reflects information submitted by entities of the United Nations system that provide assistance to Palestinian women, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank.

4. In response to Economic and Social Council resolution 2003/42, ESCWA commissioned a report which provides an overview of the most important demographic indicators over the period 1990-2000, such as population size, age/sex, structure of the population, marriage patterns, fertility rates, types of households and employment status.[1] It further examines the situation of Palestinian women in different areas, such as political participation, the labour market, education and health, and focuses also on poverty among women.

5. The second part of the report provides a review of the political and socio-economic situation facing the Palestinian community as a whole since the inception of the second intifada (29 September 2000) and the particular impact of that intifada

on the situation of Palestinian women. The report indicates that women's lives were greatly affected by loss of income, increased poverty and decreased access to health services as well as by the death or injury of family members, including primary breadwinners and children.

6. The report emphasizes the need for mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies and programmes. It also highlights the importance of developing special policies and programmes that will target the vulnerable groups of women, such as women heads of household and women in poverty.

II. Situation of Palestinian women

7. During the period under review, the occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel continued to have a serious detrimental effect on all aspects of the living conditions of the Palestinian people. The Palestinian economy continued to accumulate losses, currently equal to half of its annual gross domestic product. Unemployment increased threefold and poverty rose among more than two thirds of the population. Women and children have borne a special and enduring burden resulting from the occupation.[2]

8. The human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose a residence, the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing, the right to education, the right to health and the right to life, has drastically deteriorated.[3] The serious violation of economic, social and cultural rights has been accompanied by the continued violation of civil rights and international humanitarian law. Detentions, inhuman treatment and the destruction of property have also multiplied, while Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza continue to grow.[4] Despite some hopes generated by the launching of the road map in early June 2003, a number of concerns were reported in connection with the humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.[5]

9. According to the *Palestine Monitor* and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel, between September 2000 and July 2003, the deaths of 2,572 Palestinians and 828 Israelis were recorded as a result of widespread violence. The *Palestine Monitor* reported that the vast majority of Palestinians killed were male, 325 were children under the age of 15, and 173 were women.[6] Between 1 July 2002 and 30 June 2003, 696 civilians were killed in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (413 in the Gaza Strip and 283 in the West Bank), according to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights.[7]

10. The humanitarian crisis, emerging from sharply increasing unemployment and deteriorating economic conditions due to the Israeli closure policy, has been further exacerbated by the increasing restrictions imposed on access to international humanitarian agencies. Between April and June 2003, access to the Gaza Strip was denied or delayed to international citizens, including staff of United Nations agencies, and international and Palestinian organizations. In May 2003, borders were closed to all international citizens, except diplomatic passport holders, for a period of nine days.[8]

11. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Detainees, women living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories have been arrested in Israel for political reasons.

Prior to the outbreak of the crisis in September 2000, there were three Palestinian women prisoners. Over the past three years, an additional 77 women were arrested, seven of whom are from Jerusalem.[9] Since June 2002, the reunification of Israeli-Palestinian families has been suspended.[10] Under the new Israeli rule, Palestinian women living in East Jerusalem, currently governed by Israel, were regarded as mere residents and were not allowed to give their nationality or residency to their husbands or children.[11]

12. The current crisis continued to affect the situation of Palestinian women. Women's responsibilities within households had expanded due to the death, imprisonment or unemployment of male members of households. Many women were placed in the position of being a primary household provider, caregiver and the main strategist for coping financially, mentally and physically with the new situation.[12]

Movement restrictions and closures

13. Due to the closures of roads, local curfews and the multiplication of checkpoints, thousands of ordinary Palestinian citizens are prevented from going to work, cultivating their fields or sending their children to school. In some cases, women were injured near or inside their homes or when attempting to cross checkpoints in the course of going to work or seeking employment.[13] About 140 checkpoints operated in the West Bank, and 25 to 30 others in the Gaza Strip.[14] Hundreds of farmers lost their income since they were unable to cultivate their fields due to local curfews, road closures and checkpoints.[15] Women have been severely affected by the decline in the agricultural sector, a vital source of income for the household.[16] Many schools were unable to operate for extended periods during curfews. According to the World Bank, 170,000 children and over 6,650 teachers were unable to reach their regular classrooms and at least 580 schools were closed owing to curfews, closures and home confinement.[17] Since September 2002, children and students from kindergarten to the university level in most areas have been unable to attend school for about half of the total school days due to closures and curfews. School closures, loss of employment and economic pressures contributed to an increase in child labour, especially for those under 15 years.[18] Many secondary school students, including girls, failed to reach the examination centres in time for their yearly exams.[19]

14. For security reasons, visas are no longer issued for young Palestinians under 35 years of age to travel abroad or to move from one city of the Occupied Palestinian Territory to another. It was also reported that a number of expectant mothers could not reach the nearest hospital in time and gave birth instead at checkpoints under disastrous hygienic conditions. An increasing number of ambulances have been made to wait for hours at the checkpoints.[20]

The construction of a separation wall

15. According to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Israeli Ministry of Defence announced on 31 July 2003 that the construction of Phase I of the wall had been completed. Its 145-kilometre route runs from the village of Salem in the north to the "Elkana" settlement, south-east of Qalquilya. During the construction, Palestinian homes were demolished and swathes

of land were bulldozed and seized. The completed construction has already resulted in the confiscation of 2,850 acres of high-income Palestinian land. Over 50 communities along the wall's path have been affected. In August 2003, the Israeli authorities issued land expropriation orders for the "Jerusalem Envelope" barrier, which could leave some 50,000 Palestinians isolated on the Israeli side. In early September 2003, the Treasury decided to provide an additional 500 million new shekels (about $112 million) to complete the separation wall in the Jerusalem area. On 1 October 2003, the Israeli Cabinet approved the second phase of the wall, running from "Elkana" to Jerusalem, where a separate network of barriers was being built.[21]

16. In some places the wall is located as much as 6 kilometres inside the West Bank. As a result, villages and communities are physically separated from the rest of the West Bank and have become isolated Palestinian pockets where the inhabitants will be effectively cut off from their land and work places and/or their schools, health clinics and other social services.[22] It was estimated that about 200,000 inhabitants of the West Bank in more than 65 towns and villages will be directly affected.[23]

17. Access to safe drinking water will be disrupted and farmland destroyed, threatening the livelihoods of tens of thousands of Palestinians and damaging a wide spectrum of economic flows and social and educational services. It has been estimated, in accordance with UNICEF statistics, that 100,000 dunums of the West Bank's most fertile agricultural land, confiscated by the Israeli occupation forces, has been destroyed during the first phase of the wall construction. Vast amounts of property, notably private agricultural land and olive trees, wells, citrus groves and hothouses, which tens of thousands of Palestinians relied upon for their survival, have disappeared. In addition, further agricultural land adjacent to the wall has allegedly been declared off limits to Palestinians.[24]

Humanitarian and socio-economic crisis

18. According to the World Bank, at the end of 2002, all Palestinian economic indicators showed a persistent decline. Gross national income per capita had fallen to nearly half of its 2000 level. More than 50 per cent of the Palestinian workforce was unemployed. The portion of the population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip living under the poverty line of US$ 2 per day had increased from 20 per cent in 1999 to 60 per cent by December 2002. The number of the poor had tripled from its level of 637,000 in September 2000 to nearly 2 million in March 2003.[25]

19. The number of work permits issued by Israel declined sharply with the outbreak of the intifada. Only 32,000 permits had been issued by the end of 2002, compared with the figure of approximately 128,000 Palestinians working in Israel and Israeli settlements in September 2000. The proportion of women active in the labour market also continued to decline, falling to 11.6 per cent in the first quarter of 2003, from 13.9 per cent in the third quarter of 2000. The informal labour sector, where women were largely represented, had also been adversely affected by the economic crisis.[26]

20. According to the Humanitarian Plan of Action 2003 for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, compiled by the United Nations Technical Assessment Mission of October 2002, more than 200,000 people who depend on supplies

brought in by water tankers were left without adequate water supply for long periods because of curfews and closures. Problems of access were compounded by the fact that a number of water systems (water pipes, pumps and wells) were destroyed and a sizeable number of wells and reservoirs in rural areas have been damaged, destroyed or made inaccessible because of the ongoing violence. A number of West Bank villages adjacent to Israeli settlements have suffered from recurring closures of the main valves on their water networks.[27]

21. The dramatic decline in the standard of living increased malnutrition and has resulted in a worsening of health conditions. According to the World Bank, real per capita food consumption had declined by 30 per cent in the past two years. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics has reported that approximately one in every four women and children under the age of five suffers from mild anaemia, while 15.3 per cent of children under five, and 6.1 per cent of women between the ages of 15 and 49, suffer from moderate anaemia.[28] An update of the nutritional assessment carried out by the World Bank in January 2003 found global acute protein-calorie malnutrition in 9.3 per cent of the children across the West Bank and Gaza (13.3 per cent in Gaza and 4.3 per cent in the West Bank).[29]

22. A joint WFP/FAO Food Security and Nutrition Assessment Mission fielded in April/May 2003 noted that the capacity of Palestinian households to cope was increasingly declining. The mission further indicated that among the negative coping mechanisms adopted by many affected households were reducing expenditures on health and education, resorting to cheaper and less nutritious foods, and eating only one meal per day. A vast majority of Palestinians had become dependent on food aid for their survival.[30]

23. According to UNICEF statistics for June 2003, 38 per cent of Palestinian mothers reported increased difficulties in gaining access to health services and 65 per cent reported that the quality of their food had deteriorated.[31] A sharp increase was observed in the number of births in ambulances or at home, causing distress and complications to mothers.[32] According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, delays at checkpoints had resulted in 46 women delivering their babies while waiting for permission to pass through, and as a result, 24 women and 27 newborn babies had died.[33] The incidence of psychosocial trauma continued to climb, and it was also reported that 43 per cent of Palestinian women had requested psychosocial support.[34]

III. Assistance to Palestinian women

24. While the current situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories has made it difficult for international organizations to provide direct assistance to Palestinian women, the organizations of the United Nations system have continued to respond to their needs.

Economic activities

25. During the period 2002/03, UNRWA delivered economic assistance to Palestinian refugees through the provision of credit to microentrepreneurs. The Agency's microfinance and microenterprise programme granted 3,748 loans to

women, valued at $1.75 million. During the reporting period, nearly 1,250 women received a total of four loans or more each from the Solidarity Group lending product programme. A prime engine of the programme's recovery was the women's lending product, through rising repayment rates that increased to 94 per cent in 2002, and had already reached 91 per cent during the first six months of 2003. The women's credit product remained the most resilient of all of the programme's credit products, and it was catering to an increasing number of women microentrepreneurs who had entered the informal economy as a result of increased household poverty and hardship. The UNRWA Solidarity Group lending product programme remained one of the few sources of credit for such women.

26. During the period under review, UNRWA assisted approximately 6.05 per cent of the poorest registered refugees (special hardship case families). Out of a total population of 4,108,461 Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA, 45.8 per cent were families headed by women. The Agency's special hardship assistance provided those families with a critical safety net in the form of food support and selective cash assistance. The Agency also promoted community participation for Palestine refugee women through 71 women's programme centres, with activities including occupational training programmes, kindergartens and nurseries. A total of 48,757 participants, mainly women and children, benefited from these services. Furthermore, the Agency promoted the self-reliance of Palestine refugee women through its poverty alleviation programme, which disbursed $82,533 in small loans to more than 76 women during the period under review, and through the Solidarity Group lending schemes, which assisted more than 95 women's support groups with a total of $180,470. Other self-support programmes, which provided part-grant/part-loan financing to help special hardship case families generate income, benefited over 20 women and their families, with a total amount of $63,023.

27. UNDP provided its assistance to Palestinian women through project activities targeting female-headed rural households. One project, entitled "Emergency response programme for social infrastructure development in the Occupied Palestinian Territory", was implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and aimed to achieve sustainable food security and income generation through investing in livestock. Another project, entitled "Emergency support to existing small income generation projects", aimed to provide financial and technical support to 30 small, women-run projects. As a result of the stagnation of the economy and the high unemployment rate of the male breadwinners, the small and unsustainable projects run by these women have come to be the only means for income generation for the household. UNDP also continued the implementation of two other projects: "Fund for women's initiatives in local communities" and "Support to the women-owned household economy" in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Through these projects, UNDP continued to provide technical and financial support as well as training for community based women's organizations, as well as women business owners. These projects benefited 620 women and their families and communities.

28. UNCTAD collaborated with the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian Agriculture Relief Committee to support the livelihoods of Palestinian farmers, including women, by assisting them in marketing their large surplus of olive oil.

29. The ILO Regional Office for Arab States has undertaken activities to provide assistance to Palestinian women, including through an interregional programme on capacity-building for gender equality, employment promotion and poverty eradication. The main objective of the programme is to formulate and implement gender-sensitive employment policies and programmes, aimed at eradicating poverty. ILO also reported that disruption created by the humanitarian crisis made it impossible to implement the action plan for gender mainstreaming in the Ministry of Labour that it had developed in 2000.

30. The World Bank effectively incorporated gender dimensions in its activities and actively participated in the Gender Task Force in the West Bank and Gaza. In response to emergency needs, the World Bank managed $25 million in bilateral donor funds for job-creation projects. Of this, a total of about $2.7 million was implemented through non-governmental organizations. One of the main selection criteria for receiving emergency grants was a project's ability to benefit women directly. The Bank supported a counselling centre for women in difficult circumstances, aimed at providing support, therapy, advocacy and vocational training services to Palestinian women subject to domestic violence.

31. In December 2002, the World Bank completed a beneficiary assessment report of the second Community Development Project. In accordance with that assessment, nearly 40 per cent of all schools rehabilitated under the project were girls' or co-educational schools. The Bank constructed a girls' orphanage residence, provided vocational training to women under the development grants and provided an integrated educational programme to women with children under the project on the development of the mothers' school.

32. ESCWA formed a special task force on the socio-economic rehabilitation of Palestinian people. A gender perspective has been mainstreamed into the formulation of planned projects and programmes. ESCWA provided technical assistance to producers of gender statistics in Palestine.

Humanitarian assistance

33. WFP sent several missions to the Occupied Palestinian Territory to assess the scale of the humanitarian crisis and suggested measures to prevent further deterioration of the situation. The United Nations Inter-Agency Technical Assessment Mission, led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, visited the area in October 2002, following the assessment mission of the Personal Humanitarian Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in August 2002. WFP approved the expansion of its emergency operation for a period of one year at a total cost of $31 million, in order to specifically address the needs of 530,000 vulnerable non-refugees. In 2003, WFP began a supplementary feeding programme for 6,145 malnourished children and their families in Gaza and the southern West Bank. WFP also provided 11,190 metric tons of foodstuff to the International Committee of the Red Cross to assist 180,000 hardship cases in the rural areas of the West Bank. WFP encouraged women to receive their food entitlements directly at distribution sites to increase the effective utilization of food assistance at the household level. As a result of these efforts, over 55 per cent of food aid recipients in the Palestinian territories were women.

34. Between February and June 2003, FAO and WFP jointly undertook a comprehensive food security and nutrition assessment across all districts of the West Bank and Gaza. One key objective was to understand and document the conditions affecting the livelihood, food security and nutritional vulnerability of the population, men as well as women. The assessment examined, in particular, the food security and nutritional status of women and children. The assessment report is being finalized and will provide, inter alia, a series of recommendations for addressing the special needs of both women and men in the West Bank and Gaza.

35. FAO supported the Ministry of Agriculture of the Palestinian Authority, in collaboration with the UNDP Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP-PAPP), in the preparation of an agriculture revitalization programme (ARP) for the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The programme is an intermediate phase between emergency assistance and sustainable rehabilitation leading to longer-term agricultural development. It aims to improve rural livelihoods by first maintaining and then revitalizing agricultural activities in the West Bank and Gaza. FAO's support under the agriculture revitalization programme focused on livestock production, horticulture, rehabilitation of small-scale irrigation, marketing and capacity-building.

Education and training

36. The UNRWA education programme continued to be one of the primary means by which the Agency promoted the human resource development of female Palestine refugees. In the 2002/03 academic year, 490,949 pupils, of which 245,733 or 50.1 per cent were female, were enrolled in UNRWA preparatory, elementary and secondary schools. Of the Agency's 15,163 teachers, 48.4 per cent were female. Palestine refugee women accounted for 66.6 per cent of participants in the UNRWA pre- and in-service teacher training courses and for 33.3 per cent of its trainees in technical and semi-professional courses. Of the 56 continuing UNRWA scholarships in 2002/03, 48.2 per cent were held by women. During the same period, 90 Palestinian women in Lebanon benefited from a scholarship project addressed to women only and managed by UNRWA on behalf of a donor country. A separate scholarship programme, administered with the support of two international NGOs and the Cisco Learning Institute, provided training scholarships to 60 disadvantaged Palestinian refugees from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, 50 per cent of which were given to female refugees.

37. The Department of Education of UNRWA made special efforts to help Palestine refugee women acquire modern technological skills through a gender-specific project in collaboration with UNIFEM. The project emphasized equal access to information and communication technologies by Palestine refugee women and men, encouraged gender balance in recruitment and retention policies, built capacity to produce appropriate information content for Palestine refugee women and helped them to fulfil their socio-economic, reproductive and community participation roles. In a further effort to improve the capacity of Palestine refugee women, UNRWA continued its admission policy to its pre-service teacher training programme leading to a first-level university degree by assigning 50 per cent of the places to qualified Palestine refugee women, in order to promote gender balance among the faculty members. UNRWA also sought to enhance the capacities of

Palestine refugee women through its own recruitment policy: women occupy 55.6 per cent of senior managerial posts in the UNRWA Department of Education.

38. UNICEF supported alternative education projects in areas suffering from strict closures to ensure the opportunity for children to continue learning. UNICEF also supported initiatives to keep children in school, such as the back-to-school campaign to ensure that 1 million Palestinian children could attend school and remain in school throughout the school year. Specific interventions focusing on current and potential girl dropouts were implemented in four villages in the Bethlehem district, where the highest rate of girl dropouts was reported. These interventions included life-skills-based education for 700 girls. In addition, UNICEF supported 48 awareness-raising sessions for parents to advocate for the importance of girls' education in strengthening the economy and in national development.

39. In an effort to support and empower women, WFP provided food assistance to poor women and adolescent girls as an incentive for them to attend education and training programmes. The programmes focused on literacy, food management and income-generating skills, such as harvesting of olives for commercialization and raising animals for household consumption and sale.

Health

40. In order to promote the health status of Palestinian refugee women, UNRWA provided maternal and child health care and family planning services as an integral part of its primary health-care programme. During 2002, more than 79,900 women received antenatal care, representing approximately 60 per cent of all expected deliveries among registered refugees. Approximately 21,000 new family-planning acceptors were enrolled in the programme and the total number of continuing users exceeded 90,000. UNRWA sustained full immunization coverage of women and children against vaccine-preventable diseases and supported school health services and iron supplementation for women throughout pregnancy and post-delivery. It also sustained health educational programmes on the prevention of tobacco use and of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, which were implemented as multisectoral activities targeting school children and women. Attention was placed on improving access of women to quality care, information and services. Within the context of its family planning services, the health programme addressed such issues as early childbearing and its consequences for the health of women and children as a matter of high priority. The health programme sought to strengthen its gender-sensitive programming by obtaining, whenever possible, sex-disaggregated data, with the objective of reducing gender-based health disparities.

41. UNFPA devoted a significant proportion of its programme to ensuring women's access to appropriate and quality reproductive health care, especially emergency obstetric care and psychosocial counselling. The programme focused primarily on: the training of health professionals, including physicians, nurses and midwives in emergency obstetric care (EOC) at the community level; organization of a community campaign to disseminate information on the EOC training through the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, a Palestinian NGO; and continuation of delivery of essential drugs for family planning and reproductive health at a time when the Ministry of Health and NGO service providers were severely hampered by a lack of such supplies.

42. UNFPA also provided comprehensive support to women's health centres. Counselling services were organized at three women's health centres in El-Burej, Jabaliya and Hebron for traumatized women and their families. The women's health centres in Bureij and Jabaliya continued to provide quality reproductive health care to women in the most populated and underprivileged areas of the Gaza Strip, despite continued restricted access to the refugee camps. These centres, in collaboration with a number of local organizations, including the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), took a proactive role in the communities to curb the increasing level of violence against women. In 2003 WCLAC developed a manual on legal and psychosocial assistance in reproductive health and 15 health-care providers were trained.

43. WHO provided support for strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Health to lead and coordinate the health sector. WHO participated in a health sector review which addressed, inter alia, issues affecting women. WHO also worked on the reorganization and upgrading of mental health services and reorienting its approach to the community level, so that more women might benefit. WHO participated in a number of thematic group discussions aimed at improving the situation of Palestinian women.

44. UNFPA, WHO and UNICEF developed an advocacy network to promote access to health care as well as to raise awareness on the precarious health situation, particularly for women in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Communication professionals from UNICEF, UNFPA, UNRWA, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and WHO meet regularly to coordinate their advocacy activities. UNFPA assisted the Ministry of Health in producing a documentary film on the adverse impact of the closures on access of women in labour to hospitals, and on the reproductive rights of Palestinian women.

Women's human rights including violence against women

45. Under a technical assistance project, OHCHR has supported the Palestinian Authority since 1996 to ensure that national laws are in compliance with international human rights standards and norms. This has had a positive impact on women who encounter gender-based discrimination and domestic injustices. OHCHR funded the Women's Unit of LAW, a human rights NGO which provides legal counselling to women facing gender-based discrimination and inequality. It also offers legal aid and representation before government bodies, institutions and courts of law for women engaged in litigation to redress violations of their human rights. The Women's Unit has undertaken research on the effect of Palestinian law on women's rights, with a view to formulating recommendations for consideration by the Palestinian Legislative Council. The adoption of these legal recommendations, as well as their implementation, is closely monitored by the Women's Unit. In addition, OHCHR organized a number of training courses in human rights for different target groups, such as lawyers, prison officials, women leaders, journalists, official staff of the Palestinian National Authority, prosecutors and health-care personnel. Of the 249 participants in these training courses, 65 were women. In Gaza, OHCHR organized a four-day intensive training course for women leaders, entitled "Women and Human Rights", with the aim of strengthening the capacity of women in the area of human rights.

Media and advocacy

46. The Department of Public Information held its annual training programme for Palestinian media practitioners, in which eight Palestinian broadcasters and journalists, including three women, participated. In March 2003, the Department revised and updated the publication entitled "The Question of Palestine and the United Nations"[35] in all United Nations official languages and widely disseminated it to all United Nations offices in the field. Chapter 9 of the booklet specifically addresses issues concerning Palestinian women. United Nations Radio provided extensive coverage on the various aspects of the situation in Palestine which impact on the lives of Palestinian women.

47. UNIFEM supports a project to strengthen strategic partnerships between the media and women's organizations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Within the context of this initiative, a media and women leaders network has been established and local media and women's organizations have been trained in gender-sensitive reporting and campaigning. In addition, gender units were set up at 17 independent television stations.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

48. **During the period under review, the living conditions of Palestinian women have drastically declined. The deteriorating economic conditions, due to the Israeli closure policies, have resulted in widespread unemployment, a decline in standards of living and an increase in poverty, while access to basic services such as education and health was severely curtailed. The humanitarian and socio-economic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has reached unprecedented levels. The capacity of Palestinian women to cope with this new situation has been declining, and the number of women dependent on emergency assistance, particularly food assistance, has risen. Women have also become subject to increasing violence.**

49. **The status and living conditions of Palestinian women are linked to the achievement of a peaceful resolution of the conflict. There are important differences in how women and men respectively are affected by the socio-economic and political situation, which are apparent in such areas as basic social services, including education and health, economic opportunities and means of livelihood. These differences need to be taken into account in research, data collection, policy and strategy developments and implementation and monitoring of projects and programmes on the ground. It is also important that efforts be made to increase women's full participation in decision-making processes at all levels. As the international community seeks ways to end the conflict, it is important that gender perspectives are highlighted and that women are fully involved in the conflict resolution and peace-building initiatives, as called for in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, as well as in Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).**

50. **As a result of the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the United Nations system faced the challenge of adopting a two-track strategy, handling both emergency humanitarian**

assistance to the rapidly growing socio-economic crisis and the continuation, whenever and however possible, of ongoing development programmes.[36] Despite the difficult working conditions, the entities of the United Nations system, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, continued to provide assistance to Palestinian women through humanitarian assistance, as well as projects aimed at enhancing women's capacity to provide for themselves and their families, and to maintain women's access to education and health.

51. **It is essential that United Nations entities continue to operate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the refugee camps. As the conflict exacerbates existing hardships and creates new difficulties, continued assistance to Palestinian women, focused on food security, nutrition, psychosocial/trauma counselling, health, including reproductive health, education, human rights and economic empowerment, should be provided. Special attention should be given to the difficult situation faced by women where their responsibilities have expanded to include that of primary household provider or caregiver due to the death, injury, detention or unemployment of the male members of the family, and to increased poverty due to movement restrictions and closure and the construction of a separation wall.**

52. **While the reports by relevant bodies provided valuable information on the overall situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and increasingly referred to the particular situation of women, further opportunities should be sought to highlight fully the specific ways in which the crisis impacts on women as compared to men so that targeted actions can be taken to mitigate negative gender-specific impacts. The collection of data disaggregated by sex, which is currently insufficient, and specific studies on the impact of the crisis on women in particular areas, should be encouraged. In this regard, the linkage between the current crisis and the increase in domestic violence could be further explored. Efforts should be undertaken to explicitly identify and address gender perspectives in all international assistance programmes, in addition to implementing projects specifically targeting women. All reports on the overall situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory should include attention to the specific situation of women and girls in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).**

Notes

[1] Eileen Kuttab, "Palestinian women: situation analysis 1990-2003" (Women Studies Institute, Birzeit University, Palestine, November 2003).

[2] A/58/75-E/2003/21, Summary, p. 2.

[3] See A/58/311, paras. 24-75.

[4] E/CN.4/2003/30, para. 2.

[5] A/58/311, Summary, p. 2, and para. 33; A/58/75-E/2003/21, para. 3; the text of the road map is contained in S/2003/529, annex. The Quartet (composed of the United States of America, the United Nations, the European Union and the Russian Federation) formally presented its road map to the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority on 30 April 2003.

[6] Information received 16 September 2003 from the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO), para. 2.

[7] A/58/311, para. 71.

[8] Ibid., para. 43.

[9] UNSCO, op. cit., para. 4.

[10] A/58/311, para. 59.

[11] UNSCO, op. cit., para. 5.

[12] Ibid., para. 4.

[13] Ibid., para. 3.

[14] A/58/311, para. 34.

[15] Ibid., para. 53.

[16] UNSCO, op. cit., para. 11.

[17] A/58/88-E/2003/84, para. 8.

[18] A/58/311, para. 59.

[19] Ibid., para. 35.

[20] Ibid., para. 35.

[21] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/58/35), para. 22.

[22] The Impact of Israel's Separation Barrier on Affected West Bank Communities. Report of the Mission to the Humanitarian and Emergency Policy Group of the Local Aid Coordination Committee, May 2003, p. 3, para. 1.

[23] A/58/311, para. 26.

[24] Ibid.

[25] A/58/88-E/2003/84, para. 9.

[26] UNSCO, op. cit., para. 6.

[27] E/CN.4/2003/30, para. 15.

[28] A/58/88-E/2003/84, para. 8.

[29] *Twenty-Seven Months — Intifada, Closures and Palestinian Economic Crisis: An Assessment* (World Bank, Washington, D.C., May 2003), para. 18.

[30] A/58/311, para. 56.

[31] Ibid., para. 61.

[32] Ibid., para. 62.

[33] A/58/75-E/2003/21, para. 51.

[34] A/58/311, para. 63.

[35] DPI/2276.

[36] See A/58/75-E/2003/21.